

WHAT MOONLIGHT SCHOOLS HAVE DONE IN ROWAN COUNTY

**Mrs. Cora Wilson Stewart
Writes of Educational Work
as Carried on in Rural Sec-
tions, Where Some of the
Pupils Are Well Over the
Age of Three Score and Ten.**

TEACHERS VOLUNTEER FOR THE SERVICE AFTER THEIR REGULAR HOURS

(By 'Mrs. Cora Wilson Stewart,' Supt.
of Rowan County Schools).

The schools of Rowan county, which have just closed, embodied during their last session, a new and unique feature known as "moonlight schools," rural night schools for adults, conducted during the moonlight nights of the month, by volunteer service on the part of the public school teachers.

The experiment was popular and fruitful to a degree more remarkable than even the promoters had hoped or expected, and has elicited much favorable comment from the press, and has been endorsed by the Southern Educational Association as "the most practical plan for abolishing illiteracy in the South."

One engaged in school work in the mountains is confronted by many evidences of an insatiable desire for learning, not only on the part of the children, but of the adults, as well. The superior ancestry of the people and their native ability forbids their contentment with an inferior sphere, and any who have missed or neglected their opportunities in earlier life, seem to be haunted all through the years with the craving for knowledge, and the advantages and promotion attendant upon it.

Rowan county has no greater proportion of illiterates than any other mountain county, but unusual educational zeal and enthusiasm have been aroused among our people, preparatory to the night schools, as well as to secure greater attendance and interest in the day schools. Rallies had been held in every district, and several of various sorts in the county seat, before the night schools were proposed. The people were "in the spirit" and ready to embrace the opportunity.

There was no difficulty in enlisting the sympathy and services of the teachers. Most of them had been trained in the Morehead Normal School, an institution which inculcates the missionary spirit so strongly that most of its graduates love to serve their fellow-men, and a number had added to this equipment the splendid training and spirit of the Kentucky State Normal School at Richmond, and though young in years, these teachers were on fire with enthusiasm for the cause, and were filled with an abiding faith in the outcome of their enterprise.

On Labor Day, September 5th, the teachers of Rowan county responded to an appeal to "labor in earnest for the uplift of humanity," and instead of taking a holiday, they took the highways and hedges, the bypaths and hollows, announcing to the people the opportunity which was to be offered them, explaining the plan, and exhorting all to attend the first session which was to be conducted during the moonlight nights of September.

Previous to this campaign, and the organization of the schools, the reading text had been prepared, a little newspaper, the Rowan County School Messenger, consisting of simple sentences of news concerning the country folk, and ringing messages as to the county's possibilities and achievements. The purposes in using such a text were manifest, to save the adult from the feeling of humiliation which might accompany the use of a primer; to inspire in him a feeling of importance in being, from the first lesson, a reader of a real newspaper; to instill in him more county pride, and to tempt him through news of the movements of his countrymen to desire more. All pupils were provided with these weekly newspapers, and with copy-books free of charge.

The demand for such schools was great, and that the results would be beneficial was fully understood by the superintendent and teachers, we confidently expected a large enrollment, perhaps a hundred and fifty in all the schools of the county. Of course, there were obstacles and drawbacks had we recognized them or admitted them, or had the spirit of the people been such as would have faltered or been deterred.

How great the demand was would perhaps have never been known had we remained inactive, but was proclaimed when the school room doors were opened and the school bells rang out for the first "moonlight school" in America, when twelve hundred people came up out of the valleys and over the hills to take advantage of the opportunity offered them. Not the illiterates alone; but a number who possessed a limited education came to add to their store of knowledge. Some came to learn to read and write; farmers, lumbermen and merchants came to learn accounting; ministers came, some to learn to read their Bibles, and some to improve their reading of the Sacred Book; mothers came to learn to write letters to their precious sons and daughters who had grown up and moved to distant lands; fathers came to learn to read and write sufficiently to exercise the right of suffrage with secrecy and security; some came for a review in history and other branches. Indeed, some came for one purpose

and some for another, but, after all, all came with the one laudable ambition to strike off the shackles of ignorance. They came carrying babes in their arms, they came bent with weariness from the day's hard toil; they came leaning on canes, weary with age; and one pupil who had been devoid of pedal extremities from birth, managed in his pitiable affliction to reach the moonlight fountain of knowledge.

The attendance of two different classes, illiterates and the more advanced, placed an extra hardship on for more instructors. This demand was nobly met by former teachers, who had abandoned the profession for farming, lumbering or the mercantile business. These men and women quietly volunteered and took charge of one class, night after night, during the session.

The delight of the adult pupils in their opportunity and in each step of progress was splendid to behold.

Among the beginners a desire to write their names and to read the Bible seemed to be their first ambition. Stalwart men stood at the blackboards after a few evenings training and wrote their names with greater pride than ever filled the heart of a graduate from Harvard upon receiving his degree. Aged men read from the newspapers their first sentences about Rowan county's greatness and her promising future, and assented to it with loud and emphatic exclamation, "That's the truth;" one veteran when he had mastered the intricacies of his autograph, and could write it exclaimed with joy, "Glory, I will never have to make my mark any more."

It was inspiring to see these resolute older girls and boys bending assiduously over their lessons, and occupying the desks which their children and grand children had occupied during the day, and it was inspiring to remember that they were being instructed by their neighbor boys and girls, young people who had grown up among them, and who knew the peculiarities and limitations of their senior pupils, and who possessed unlimited sympathy and patience with them.

Boys and girls of twenty-one, who were ashamed to come back into the day schools, took this opportunity of "catching up;" but no more earnest and persevering were they than the older men and women who ranged in age all along middle life to the ripe old age of eighty-six.

The influence spread beyond results that can be measured, and some whose eye sight or other disabilities prevented them from attending the schools made appeals and were taught between day and night sessions by the teachers in their homes. Numbers of cases were reported of husbands who taught their wives in their homes, and wives who taught their husbands, preparatory to entering the second session of the night schools, they having missed the first.

And one case is recorded where a man who made his initial effort at mastering the alphabet in a night school under the instruction of a young girl who was in charge of the school, a few weeks later taught his brother's wife to read and write.

During the first two weeks' session of the night schools about one hundred persons learned to read and write, and a number wrote legible, but crude letters to the superintendents and to other friends, at the close of the session.

There was a great demand for an extension of the term, the clamor coming not only from those in attendance, but from teachers, too, despite the fact that they were already showing the strain of day and night service. No restrictions were placed on teachers in the matter; but they were urged to take a recess until the moonlight nights of October.

The effect of these schools on the day schools was beneficial, increasing the attendance, and especially the regularity of attendance, parents who had attended the night school, making heroic sacrifices and efforts to keep their children in school regularly. The effect on the county and on the community life has been wholesome. Some of the night schools resolved themselves into adult Sunday-school classes; some have, by private subscription, started day schools, which

they will attend during the winter; more correspondence is passing through the mails; more literature is being circulated and read; education is more popular, there is an increased respect for law and order; an intensified love for the Bible, the Sabbath-school and all religious institutions, is manifested; all hearts are happier, and the people are firm believers and advocates of "moonlight schools" as one of the greatest blessings which has come to uplift them.
